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History of the Flag

by

Mrs. Lillian Clark Cary

National Patriotic Instructor



of the

Ladies of the Grand Army
of the Republic

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By transfer
The White House.

Preface

The History of the Flag was compiled by the National Patriotic Instructor, during the administration of Mrs. Ella Jones, National President of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, 1912-1913, whose untiring efforts and earnest endeavors, for twenty-four years of devotion to our Order, has endeared her to all her associates. In all these years she has seen no obstacle too difficult to surmount and allowed no failure to defeat her in the prosecution of a purpose that she knew would benefit the soldier or the widow. When her work as National President has ceased, her name will go down in the history of our Order—not alone on account of the extent and efficiency of her work, not alone for the great interest she displayed in advancing the usefulness of our Order, but for the grand and noble spirit of Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty she manifested in all her labors and for the splendid example of high, moral and intellectual attainment and for her strict observance of all that was right and just and true.

The National President appoints the National Patriotic Instructor of this Order, whose duty it is to promote patriotism, to teach the children to honor and venerate the names of the heroes who fought to maintain the principles of our government, to train them in the Flag Salute of our Order and to see that the children are instructed in the history of their country.

The Department Patriotic Instructors of each State have a similar duty to perform; the Patriotic Instructors of the local organizations, called Circles, teach also the lessons of patriotism and the duties of citizenship.

The Flag We Love

Mrs. Lillian Clark Cary.

Behold our Flag! the red and white and blue,
Whose peer is yet to be unfurled.
A Flag that no defeat-dishonor ever knew,
The stainless banner of the Christian world.

It stands for truth, for justice and for right;
For freedom of the soul, that led
Its heroes on to battle through the night,
Nor ever fear of death to dread.

There beams from out its stars of purest white,
Above the field of heaven's blue,
A calm and ever shining peaceful light—
A symbol of His promise true.

Its stripes in crimson folds forever gleam,
And long wide bars of spotless white;
The hard fought struggle of the Old Thirteen
For Justice, Liberty and Right.

Its beauty and its glory are not claimed
Nor owned by any potentate,
It was not made in any sovereign's name,
Or fashioned only for the rich and great.

It waves from every housetop, church and home
And from the lofty towers above;
It is the flag of every humble home,
And of the Christian land we love.

As long as God shall ever reign above,
And earth her mission yet fulfill,
The Stars and Stripes, our nation's pledge of love,
Shall wave unsullied o'er us still.

Behold our Flag! sound forth the battle cry!
Until the rocks and hills will move,
'Till echoes long and loud from sea and sky,
Repeat the story of our love.



"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and to the
Republic for which it stands: One Nation indivis-
ible, with Liberty and Justice for All."

The History of Our Flag

Patriotism is the creature of early association. It begins in the heart of the boy at a very early age. The rocking horse and battered baseball are the objects of his childish affection, and around them he weaves a story in fancy that carries with it the spirit of chivalry and the right to protect. He learns to love the trees that surround his home, the lane at his father's gate and the swallows that build their nests in the eaves. In after years he loves his country with all the ardor of his soul, that gives him a place in her glorious citizenship. Patriotism is therefore instinctive. Count Tolstoy has said: "It is impossible to unite patriotism with peace." The American people believe that it can be united with peace, and that is the kind of patriotism that is being taught by the patriotic instructors of today. Centuries ago in foreign countries patriotism meant fidelity to a king, a tribe, a hero; and that fidelity was marked by cruelty and rapine and war. The people called it patriotism, but it was war; and such a fidelity was not in harmony with peace. In this day of progress and reform good citizenship marks the patriot. He loves his country; he must love the principles for which it stands.

Physical courage and contempt of death are not the only characteristics of a soldier; a military

uniform and a military bearing do not make the soldier. He who puts on the full armor and goes out to meet the enemy in the heat of battle must have a conception of that which is right. "Not by material forces, but by moral forces are the actions of men governed."

Right thought, right principles, reverence for human life mark the patriot. Our patriotism in these days is tested in the defense of our liberties as we understand them and the enforcement of our laws as they are written.

The high standard of citizenship, obedience to law, the enforcement of law and the education of the people that they may understand those laws are predominant features in our national life. The general trend of our nation should be towards the achievement of the highest ideals. A pessimistic view of the future of our country is not patriotic. The abolishing of organizations that would monopolize the power, the wealth, the resources of our nation, the entire disbanding of cliques and sects whose doctrines are demoralizing and anarchistic, all of these reforms in our national life must come to teach men that they cannot pay allegiance to the flag without paying allegiance to that which it represents—liberty, justice, equality—"a government of the people, by the people and for the people."

Therefore the kind of patriotism that is being taught today, by those qualified to teach, is not that which will lead to the gathering of armies for the overthrow of enemies in order that victory may be won, but a patriotism that will make the future history of our country a lesson to the world of de-

voted loyalty to the highest principles of statesmanship.

That patriotism that led the American soldier on to fields of battle is a symbol of devotion to country and that devotion is marked today by many great monuments. A love and veneration for their services and a desire to perpetuate their memory through all generations to come, by American citizens, the inscription of their names and heroic deeds on the hearts of a loving people are imperishable memorials. It is not the flag of a president or monarch, but the flag of every American citizen to which a hero owes his devotion. We cannot look upon that banner without acquiring a larger conception of loyalty, of patriotism, of duty.

We love our flag not because it waved in victory over many fields of battle, but we love it for what it represents.

The Flag stands for power, for liberty. It stands for the great principles of the American government that Washington and Lincoln and hosts of others have built up by tireless efforts and long continued fidelity at the post of duty. Our flag was established one hundred and thirty-six years ago and has been unfurled in five great wars and sixteen conflicts with the Indians. It is the greatest flag of the greatest nation. General Grant said of it: "No one is great enough to write his name upon it."

"No tyrant hath claimed that flag for his own
Its bright folds were never unfurled
To flatter or shelter the glare of a throne;
That banner was born for the world."

During the ancient days a standard was always carried by leaders into battle, and these ensigns were regarded as symbols of power and an inspiration to victory.

In military expeditions standards are used to mark out the stations or encampments. Old Testament history records the use of standards as designating the tribe or family. In Numbers 2-34 there is an account of how "Israel pitched by their standards every one after their families." Jeremiah said to his people (4-6): "Set up a standard toward Zion." The standards of the Hebrews resembled those of the Egyptians and Assyrians--a figure or device of some kind elevated on a pole. The Persians bore an eagle fixed to a head of a lance, while the dragon was the ensign of the Chinese and Parthians. Constantine the Great used as his standard the Lebarum, a long pole with a gold cross, which he carried as a sign of victory before his army.

The soldiers of the Eternal City swore by their ensign. They often advanced into battle with a whisp of hay. These ensigns were guarded with religious veneration.

The North American Indians carried poles fledged with feathers from the wings of eagles. Streamers and tassel pendants on standards began to be used and gradually these were replaced by flags. Thus the flag is an emblem of great antiquity.

In early days the cross was employed as a standard, and when the English landed on this continent under the leadership of John Cabot the Cross of St. George was unfurled; previous to this time the flag

that Columbus planted upon our shores was that of Leon and Castile. The Spaniards brought with them two flags, the flag that marked the voyage and the ensign of Spain. This is the earliest history of European flags on our continent of which we have any knowledge. The French, the Dutch, the English all brought the different banners of their nations and unfurled them on our continent. The Flag of England was the flag of the colonies from the settlement of Jamestown, 1607, until the Revolution. When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth they carried the cross of St. George, the flag of the English ships. When the two kingdoms of England and Scotland were united in the reign of the first Stuart, the crosses of the two nations were united: the cross of St. George for England, a red cross on a white ground, and the cross of St. Andrew for Scotland, a white cross on a blue ground, were joined in one field and the flag was called the King's colors.

The colonists began to realize their own independence. Their early experience had taught them many lessons that were well learned. From the very beginning they showed a disposition of displeasure with the King's colors. The cross stood for persecutions they had not forgotten. It represented a power that was distasteful to the Puritans because it stood for a religion which they regarded at that time as false and under which they had suffered. In Salem, Mass., some of the extreme ones cut out the cross from the banner of the soldiery. This placed those in authority in a queer dilemma; they did not want to countenance a disloyalty to the flag nor did

they want to offend their own people. As a compromise, the King's colors were placed over the castle in Boston Harbor, and the military companies were empowered to choose their own colors. As a result the American Revolution began its battles under many flying flags. In 1651 the Governor of Massachusetts ordered "That the captain advance the colors of England on all occasions." The colors were the white flag of St. George that had been adopted by the English parliament.

When Gen. Putman read a declaration from the Continental Congress which set forth the cause and necessity for taking up arms against England, the soldiers showed their pleasure and enthusiasm by loud cheering, and after the prayer by the chaplain, following a salute from the cannon, a beautiful red flag was unfurled with two mottoes, "He who transplanted still sustains," and the motto of Massachusetts, "An Appeal to Heaven." On one side of this was a red ground and on the other a pine tree, a design used on a number of New England flags. In 1652 the pine tree appeared on silver coins of the Massachusetts colony.

In 1643 the colonies of Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut were united in a league which was called the United Colonies of New England. This was the first union in the western world. In 1686 they adopted a common flag which was received from the King.

"When the embattled farmers fired the shot that was heard around the world," Capt. Nathaniel Page, who was flag-bearer of his company at Concord and a minute-man of the Town of Bed-

ford, Mass., carried a flag with a maroon ground bearing an outstretched hand grasping a sword and on which was the inscription, "Vince Aut Morire" (Conquer or Die). Historians say that this flag is now in the Public Library at Bedford, Mass.

During the early part of the Revolutionary War each military company had its standard. Sometimes the company had special standards and sometimes the state arms were displayed. For seventy-five years the different military organizations carried flags of their own design. "The Rattle Snake Flag" was a peculiar standard and was borne on several flags; but it was not long in use, as an ensign of this kind showed a defiant attitude. It had a ground of thirteen horizontal bars, alternate red and white, while the snake extending across the stripes bore the motto "Don't Tread On Me."

Count Pulaski, a Polish patriot, fought desperately to free his country from the grasp of Russian tyranny, and, after a term of imprisonment, went to France, and subsequently came to America. He arrived in Philadelphia and volunteered to serve in the American army. He distinguished himself in battle and rose to the rank of brigadier general. His corps was called "Pulaski's Legion" and the "Moravian Sisters of Bethlehem," Pennsylvania presented to his corps a crimson banner embroidered in yellow silk and sent it to him with their blessing. Longfellow has described in beautiful verse the presentation of this flag. It was given to Pulaski while he was suffering from a wound. In the assault on Savannah, Ga., he was mortally wounded and died in that city.

The banner carried by the Philadelphia troop of Light Horse, who escorted General Washington to New York in 1775 was presented to the troop by Abram Markoe, a patriot. It was thirty-four inches wide and forty inches long and was made of yellow silk with thirteen stripes in the upper left hand corner and bore the motto "For These We Strive." A hundred and thirty years have passed away since this flag was presented to the troop, but it is well preserved in a glass case in the Armory at Philadelphia.

When the Continental Congress was in session in 1775, a committee was appointed consisting of Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Harrison and Thos. Lynch to design a flag. The troops had now become the army of the colonies united together to resist unjust taxation. The designing of the new flag was an important matter. The committee reached Washington's camp October fifteenth and remained there until the twenty-second. We have but very little record of the report of that committee, but, however, on the second day of January, 1776, the flag floated over the American camp at Cambridge. This flag had thirteen stripes, red and white, with the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew, and on account of the union of the colonies was called the "Flag of the Union." Washington says: "We hoisted the Union flag in compliment to the thirteen colonies and saluted it with thirteen guns."

Paul Jones, the great patriot, flung to the breeze an ensign which was the first flag of America ever shown on a man-of-war. There has been much discussion as to what flag was unfurled on

the "Alfred," by Paul Jones and there seems to be no authentic account of it, but one writer says it was the "Pine Tree Flag" and Admiral Preble, who is authority on the subject, says it was the "Flag of America" which Jones unfurled on the "Alfred," the Union flag of thirteen stripes symbolizing the thirteen colonies, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

The flag raised by Washington at Cambridge was not satisfactory to the Continental Congress. The standard was obsolete. Why was it necessary for the King's colors to be displayed in America? The old flag represented the longings, the aspirations, the hardships of the thirteen colonies who had struggled for independence. They had secured that independence at a great sacrifice and there must be a new flag to represent the new ideas of the new nation. Congress appointed a committee composed of General Washington, Robert Morris and George Ross to design a flag. They called on Mrs. E'etsy Ross at her little home on Arch street, Philadelphia, and requested her to make a flag with thirteen stars to harmonize with the thirteen stripes. We have no complete knowledge of the designing of this flag, but we do know that when that flag was born it symbolized a patriotism and an independence that has ever since been characteristic of the American people.

The resolution was passed June 14, 1777, establishing the flag. "That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes alternate red and white; that the Union be thirteen stars, white in a

blue field." It was not officially promulgated until September 3, 1777. The new flag was displayed in the Battle of Brandywine on September 11. Before this it had been displayed at Fort Stanwix, now Fort Schuyler, the site of which is now occupied by Rome, New York. The fort was invested and the garrison having no colors proceeded to manufacture a standard. Shirts were cut up to furnish the white material; blue came from the cloak of an officer and red came in small pieces from different soldiers. At the surrender of the British under General Burgoyne, the decisive engagement of the war, the new flag was in evidence.

General Washington was a descendant of an English family, and his ancestors bore a coat of arms that he used as a seal. One historian says: "At the old church at Brighton, England, the tombs of Washington's ancestors are marked by memorial plates of brass bearing the arms of the family, which consisted of a shield that bore the stars and stripes." It is supposed that the stars of the American flag were suggested by the three stars on the coat of arms. Another theory advanced by historians is that it represented the elevated purposes and lofty ideas of the citizens of the republic. From the Cambridge flag the national flag was derived. The thirteen stripes, one for each colony, alternately red and white, which were a part of the colonial flag, were retained; but the Union instead of showing the King's colors displayed a new constellation, thirteen white stars in a blue field.

Charles Sumner said: "The stripes alternate red and white proclaim the original union of the thirteen states to maintain the Declaration of In-

dependence. The stars proclaim the union of states constituting our national constellation, which gives a new star with every new state. The two together signify union. The very colors have a significance —white is for purity; red for valor; blue for justice, and altogether stars and stripes and colors blazing in the sky make a flag to be cherished by all our hearts, to be upheld by all our hands."

Our flag is not the youngest of National symbols. Very many of the present flags of Europe are much more recent than our flag. The flag of the German Empire dates from 1871. The flag of Italy was adopted in 1848. The flag of Spain in its present form is not older than 1785; Portugal dates from 1830.

One historian says: "The treaty of peace between England and the United States was signed in Paris on September 3, 1783. This was the acknowledgment by Great Britain of the independence of her former colonies; and the other nations of Europe stood by consenting. Our flag was admitted, at that time, on equal terms with the standards of ancient kingdoms and states, to the company of the banners of the world."

In 1795 the first change was made in the National flag, after the admission of Vermont and Kentucky into the Union, when Congress ordered "That from and after the first day of May the flag of the United States be fifteen stripes, alternate red and white; and the union be fifteen stars, white in a blue field.

No change was made in the flag until 1818, when the admission of five other states—Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana and Mississippi—

made the flag with fifteen stars out of harmony, and Congress passed "An act to establish the Flag of the United States."

"Section 1. Be it enacted, etc., That from and after the Fourth of July next, the flag of the United States be thirteen horizontal stripes alternate red and white; that the Union have twenty stars white in a blue field.

"Section 2. And be it further enacted, That on the admission of every new state in the Union, —one star be added to the Union of the flag; and that such addition shall take effect on the Fourth of July next succeeding such admission. Approved April 4, 1818." The first flag unfurled under the new law was hoisted over the House of Representatives, April 14, 1818.

No change has been made in the National Flag since 1818, the stars have been added until we now have forty-eight stars. Each star represents a state and shows the development of the Union; while each stripe stands for the original thirteen states. The flags carried through the war of 1812 had fifteen stars, those of the Mexican war period twenty-nine. In the War of the Rebellion the flag had thirty-five stars and in the Spanish War they had increased to forty-five.

For eighty-nine years after the flag was adopted it was made from foreign material. The first American flag made of American bunting was hoisted over the Capitol at Washington February, 1866. It was the gift of Gen. F. Butler.

Our flag has been displayed in many parts of the world. It was planted in Tripoli in 1805; in

Mexico in 1846; in Manila, Porto Rico and Cuba in 1898.

When President Lincoln was informed on reaching Philadelphia February, 1861, that enemies were plotting to take his life and that it was unsafe for him to appear in public, he said: "I promised to raise the American flag on old Independence Hall tomorrow morning, the anniversary of Washington's Birthday, and in the same afternoon to attend a reception by the Pennsylvania legislature, and both these engagements I will keep if it costs me my life."

That Abraham Lincoln loved the flag is attested by his life of devotion and loyalty to his country; and makes his character and career an inspiration to every American citizen.

The flag that flew over Fort McHenry in Baltimore harbor, on the night of September 13, 1814, was made by the wife of Col. Henry S. Pickerell of Baltimore. After exposure to shot and shell it measured thirty feet square, each of its fifteen stripes was about two feet broad and each of its fifteen stars two feet from point to point. The flag has been frequently used at celebration of the Bombardment. September 14, 1824, it waved over General Washington's war tent on the occasion of the reception to General LaFayette. It was exhibited at the Centennial Exposition, and at the old South Church, Boston, June 14, 1877, on the centennial anniversary of the adoption by Congress of the stars and stripes as the flag of the United States. In 1880, at Baltimore, it formed a striking feature of the celebration of the battle of Fort McHenry and had as a guard of honor two hundred descendants of

those who fought under it at that time. The flag was presented recently to the National Museum at Washington by Eben Appleton, a descendant of Major George Armistead, who retained it as a memento after the bombardment; the flag is now the property of the government. It was this banner that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the American national anthem. As Key looked across the fort he saw "the flag was still there." It is said he then wrote a sketch of the "Star-Spangled Banner" on the back of a letter.

"Then conquer we must when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto, "In God is our trust;"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Thus the history of the flag unfolds itself. Thus we weave around it a story that will be told through all ages. It will ever be unfurled upon the breeze, and the great American people for whose principles it stands, will see that its beauty is never sullied, that not a single star is marred or a single stripe is stained.

Flag Day, June 14, as a national anniversary is becoming more general every year. Proclamations are sent out ordering the flag to be placed on all buildings on that day, and the observance by all citizens of the birthday of our banner is earnestly requested.

This Flag, the Stars and Stripes, was brought home from the blood-stained battlefields of the Southland by the heroes of the Rebellion. But as we think of that War we recall the fact that more than six hundred thousand did not return with the battle flags, but fell, while they held them, dying

in the service of their country. Brave and courageous Grant came home and Sherman and Sheridan and Thomas, who led the armies on to fields of victory. They came with crowns of laurels, with bronzed faces and tattered clothes still holding the flag of their country.

“The union of lakes, the union of lands,
The union of States none can sever,
The union of hearts, the union of hands,
And the Flag of our Union forever.”

Ellsworth, who tore down the Confederate flag, died on the stairs of the inn at Alexandria; he sleeps today in the Silent City of the Dead and the flag of his country waves above his tomb. Winthrop, who laid down his life in the first battle of the war; Baker, the gallant leader who cheered his men at Bull Run and fell when a tremendous onset was made, and Lyon and hundreds and thousands of others “Sleep their long and dreamless sleep, while their flag a requiem sings.”

Admirals Dewey and Sampson and Schley carried the Stars and Stripes amid the shot and shell, and their valiant deeds and the deeds of the heroes in that last war, and the courage they displayed, place them on a pedestal of greatness and give them rank among America’s bravest and best of soldiers. They are a living example of patriotism to the rising generation. The brave men who fell in that last war have their banner as their winding sheet. The final triumph was achieved by their devotion to that flag and the cause it represents. Their victories made this Republic once more the admiration of the world.

The soldiers of the Civil War who are with us yet, but whose gray hair and faltering step remind us that ere long they will gaze for the last time on the banner they love, through all these long years have built up a citizenship, have contributed to a nation's welfare. They not only fought and saved the flag but have upheld the principles for which it stands. They have taught a patriotism, an allegiance to country, which will be an inspiration for all generations to come. Lives like theirs must ever be an incitement to loyalty, and as the "darkness deepens and earth's vain shadows flee" they will say:

"I am not eager, bold nor strong, all that is past;
I am ready not to do at last—at last.
My good right hand forgets its cunning now—
To march the weary march I know not how.
My half day's work is done and this is all my part;
I give a patient God a patient heart.
And grasp His banner still though all the blue be
dim,
Knowing these stars as well as stripes lead after
Him."

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1912-1913.

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